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The Christmas Spirit



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CHARACTERS

WALTER HARDCASH.....*Proprietor of a large business*
MARY DOUGLAS.....*His stenographer*
MR. FOSTER.....*An old employee*
MR. BARKER.....*Holds an important
position in Hardcash's employ*
TEDDY O'BRIEN.....*Newsboy*
MRS. JANET BLACK....*Scrubwoman, widow of Raymond
Black, soldier and former porter for Hardcash*
PERKINS.....*The Butler*
CHRISTMAS SPIRIT
COOK AND SERVANTS
MRS. EFFIE DOUGLAS.....*Mary's mother*
FRANK BENT.....*Young employee of Hardcash,
Mary's intended*
CAMERON.....*The gardener*
MRS. CAMERON.....*His wife*
FRED HOLMES.....*Nephew of Hardcash*
MRS. HOLMES.....*Fred's wife*
MISS ALLEN.....*Mrs. Holmes' sister*
MURIEL }
WALTER }.....*Fred's children*
MRS. O'BRIEN.....*Teddy's mother*

TIME: *Nearly Christmas*

PLACE: *Anywhere or Everywhere*

TIME OF PLAYING: *One and One-Half Hours*

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THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

ACT I

SCENE: *Office of WALTER HARDCASH, furnished with desk, chair, chair for stenographer, calendars on wall.*

MR. HARDCASH. Well, here it is Christmas again—such a nuisance! Everyone crazy with excitement—everybody wanting holidays and expecting Christmas presents: Well, *my* staff know well enough not to expect anything. Rubbish! Now I must answer Fred's letter, I suppose. [*Touches bell.*] [*Enter MARY DOUGLAS.*] I want you to take a letter, Miss Douglas.

MARY DOUGLAS. All right, Mr. Hardecash. [*Sits in extra chair, notebook in hand.*]

MR. HARDCASH [*dictates*]. To Mr. Frederick J. Holmes, 563 East Twenty-third street, City. Dear Fred: Your usual invitation to Christmas dinner to hand and as usual I decline. I don't know what in thunder you keep on asking me for. I never came and I never intend to come, so kindly discontinue the invitation. You gain nothing by it.

MARY DOUGLAS [*looking up*]. Oh-h-h!

MR. HARDCASH. What's the matter? Think I should n't say that, I suppose. Just because you've been here half a dozen years you think you can say what you like.

MARY DOUGLAS [*half crying*]. Oh Mr. Hardcash! I didn't say anything.

MR. HARDCASH. Well, if you didn't, you *looked* it. If I can't say what I like to my own nephew when he insists on inviting me to his shabby house—

MARY DOUGLAS [*rising hurriedly*]. More shame to you, sir, if it is shabby and you so rich and he such a nice young man and having such a nice wife! If they *are* poor, they're happy, and I won't write your letter, so there! [*Stamps.*] You're a cross old thing, there! [*Stamps.*] And I'm going to leave, you're so mean to us all and no one can bear you! *There!* [*Bursts out crying and runs out.*]

MR. HARDCASH [*staring in amazement and getting crosser every moment, but unable to get a word in*]. Good Heavens! What's this? What do you mean? The hussy! The idea! [*Keeps pressing bell and muttering.*] *Voices outside:* "There, there, Mary, don't cry!" "You'd better answer his bell, Miss Douglas." "I won't, if he rings all night." "Oh, well." [*Door opens. Enter MR. FOSTER.*]

MR. HARDCASH. What does this mean, Foster? Why am I defied and ignored in my own office? See that that girl packs herself off at once. What does it mean?

MR. FOSTER [*deferentially*]. I'm very sorry, Mr. Hardcash. Miss Douglas was quite upset.

MR. HARDCASH. Upset! I should think so. Have you any idea what has caused it? I never had such an experience in my office. What's the matter with the girl?

MR. FOSTER [*hesitating*]. Well, you see, sir, it was this way—you see—well—you see—

MR. HARDCASH [*pounding desk*]. Stop your shilly-shallying and out with it!

MR. FOSTER [*desperately*]. Well, you see, sir, she and young Bent have been engaged to be married for a couple of years and they planned to get married this New Year's day, expecting the usual raise of salary at Christmas, and your decision yesterday to raise no salaries this year has spoiled their plans. Miss Douglas is of course very unhappy—

MR. HARDCASH [*snarling*]. And helps matters out by throwing up her job!

MR. FOSTER [*hastily*]. Oh sir, I hope you'll forgive her hastiness—she could never afford to lose her work, I'm sure—and—[*hesitates and speaks in a dignified but respectful way*]. If you could see your way to give Bent his raise, the rest of the staff would, I'm sure, be willing to let it go at that. [*Enter MR. BARKER.*]

MR. BARKER. Excuse me, Mr. Foster, I was waiting to speak to Mr. Hardcash and I couldn't help overhearing your last words. I want to say right here to you, Mr. Hardcash, that *I'm not* willing to put up with any more of your treatment and I'm going to give you a piece of my mind.

MR. HARDCASH [*arising*]. Do you imagine—

MR. BARKER [*sternly*]. No, I *know*! *Sit down*! You've got to listen to me and you can't help yourself. I'm dismissing myself from your employment because I'm sick and tired of working for a slave-driver and, for once in your life, you're going to hear the truth.

MR. FOSTER. Now—now—Mr. Barker—

MR. BARKER. Shut up, Foster! You're the first one I'm going to speak about. [*Points to MR. FOSTER.*] Look at that man, Mr. Hardcash, grown old and gray in your firm's service. In your father's time he would have had a pension and a chance to live the quiet country life he loves. But *you* do away with the pension and he has no choice but to work along until he drops. Look at old Cameron, your gardener—crippled with rheumatism and ruined by doctors' bills for his sick wife. You wouldn't give him a chance at all to keep him out of the poor house. Look at this fine young Bent, here. If Mr. Foster could afford to retire, Bent naturally would succeed to his position and have some prospect of happiness. [*Both men keep trying to interrupt but MR. BARKER goes steadily on.*] And that nice girl who has been your stenographer for six years—and a rotten salary you've paid her! Her little preparations are made for her marriage and you refuse Bent the raise that you promised and that is his by right. [*MR. HARDCASH, raging, starts up.*] Sit down! You keep quiet, Foster. That fine young nephew, your only living relative, he is worth ten of you and is struggling along with his small salary and his nice family and you do nothing for him—but that's none of my business.

MR. HARDCASH [*sarcastically*]. No! Isn't it? I'm surprised!

MR. BARKER. No, it isn't, but this business is my business until I leave it, and I say you're a rotten employer. You could bind these people to you and your business by ties of loyalty—

MR. HARDCASH. Want me to kiss them good night?

MR. BARKER. You wouldn't need to do that. If you were half-way decent it would do. Now I'm resigning right here and now.

MR. HARDCASH [*sarcastically*]. So considerate of you.

MR. BARKER. I'm going to Grant & Bailey, your rivals, Mr. Hardcash, and if I can't carry a good bit of business with me—

MR. HARDCASH. Look here, Barker, you can't do that.

MR. BARKER. Can't I? Watch me! They're going to pay me double the salary you do and they are fine people to work for and I'm going to work for them. I bid you good-bye, sir, with a thankful heart. [*Goes out.*]

MR. HARDCASH [*wipes his forehead*]. Whew! What a vicious fellow! I suppose we can fill his place, Foster?

MR. FOSTER. I don't know, sir. He's a smart fellow and good hearted, too. He was much upset by Miss Douglas. I don't know where you'd get anyone to take the position unless you increased the salary.

MR. HARDCASH. *Increased the salary!* Good heavens, Foster, you fellows seem to think I'm made of money.

[*Walks up and down impatiently, grabs coat and hat.*]

I'm going now. See that that letter is sent off. If that little fool doesn't do it, see that someone else does. Good heavens, what's that? [*Voices in outer office: "Paper, sir?" "Paper, Evening Times!" "Hush-sh!" Door opens. TEDDY comes in, ragged, cold, papers under arm.*]

TEDDY. Paper, sir?

MR. HARDCASH. No! Get out! [MR. FOSTER gives coin

and takes paper, smiling at TEDDY, who touches cap and says, "Thank you, sir."]

MR. HARDCASH [*sarcastically*]. So you can afford to give a quarter for a penny paper, can you?

MR. FOSTER [*gently*]. He's a bright little fellow, sir, and it's Christmas time—

MR. HARDCASH. Yah-h-h—Christmas times are an excuse for all sorts of extravagance. [*Puts on coat and hat, MR. FOSTER helping him. Bumps heard outside and on door.*]

Enter MRS. BLACK with scrub-pail, brush and cloths.

MRS. BLACK. Oh, beg your pardon, sir—it's so late I thought 'course you'd gone. [*Backs out, mumbling apologies.*]

MR. HARDCASH. Who on earth?

MR. FOSTER. Just the scrub woman, sir—a decent body—widow of Raymond Black—

MR. HARDCASH. That porter fellow killed in the war?

MR. FOSTER. Not killed, sir, came home unwounded and died of pneumonia just a month after reaching home. No pension for poor Janet, so she has to do what she can, poor thing. Good night, sir, good night. [*Exit MR. HARDCASH.*]

MR. FOSTER. Dear, dear, if only he was like his poor father! Then there was his sister, Mrs. Holmes. She was more like *him* and she died, poor thing, before Mr. Hardcash got rich. And that fine fellow, Fred, he could do so much for Fred. Well, money isn't everything. I'll bet there isn't a more unhappy wretch in this town tonight than that same man, money and all. [*Exit.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: MR. HARDCASH'S *Library*. Any simple library scene. It may be elaborate, of course, if possible. *Necessities: Table with telephone—chairs for MR. HARDCASH and MR. BARKER—entrance behind chair for CHRISTMAS SPIRIT—portieres to be withdrawn to show scenes to MR. HARDCASH and audience. MR. HARDCASH should be sitting at one side so that portiere scene should be right in line with the audience.*

MR. HARDCASH [*enters and drops wearily in chair, head on hand*]. Oh dear! I must be getting old. Such scenes are too much for me. I don't know what we're coming to. That girl breaking out at me like that—and Barker—I don't want to lose Barker. He's a smart fellow and he's popular. He'll carry a bunch of trade with him. Blame this Christmas business! It sets them crazy. And I'll have to break in a new secretary and that little Douglas hussy knew all my business. She looked like Effie Bridham when she stamped and raged. That's how Effie looked when I foreclosed Hi Smith's mortgage. I would have married Effie. Perhaps if I had I might have been a different man. Well—I bet she's been sorry—she'd have been rich—rich— [*says the word over and over, rubbing hands*] —rich—rich. [*Knock at door.*]

MR. HARDCASH. Come in. [*Enter butler.*] Well, Perkins?

PERKINS [*diffidently*]. I just wished to ask, sir, if it

will be all right to allow the maids and men of the house to have tomorrow evening free?

MR. HARDCASH. Tomorrow evening? Why! Haven't they had their usual evening off?

PERKINS. Yes, sir, yes, sir, to be sure, but it being Christmas Eve and all—

MR. HARDCASH. Christmas Eve! I'm sick of hearing of Christmas Eve! Why should they neglect their duty on Christmas Eve?

PERKINS. Well, sir, their families and their young friends—

MR. HARDCASH [*harshly*]. I have nothing to do with "their families and their young friends." I hire them for certain hours and certain duties and I expect them to be on hand.

PERKINS. But, sir—

MR. HARDCASH. No more now, Perkins. That will do.

[PERKINS *sadly retires*, MR. HARDCASH *frowning and tapping fingers on table*. CHRISTMAS SPIRIT *enters and stands beside his chair, a little back*. MR. HARDCASH, *uneasy, shifts position, looks up and down, scowls and finally, slowly looks around—amazed at sight of CHRISTMAS SPIRIT.*]

MR. HARDCASH [*frightened*]. Who are you?

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT [*solemnly*]. I am the Spirit of Christmas. Hard, cold, unhappy man, I am here to teach you something of that season you desecrate by your heartless rejection of everything that makes for peace and happiness.

MR. HARDCASH. The Christmas Spirit—this is a dream. I shall wake up presently—[*draws hand across eyes,*

looks away, looks back to find CHRISTMAS SPIRIT still there, and speaks in a trembling voice—Why are you here? This is no place for the Spirit of Christmas.

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. That I know well, but *you*, wretched man, must learn the lesson that I teach. I shall show you those whom you despise and oppress, who yet are happier than you, their slave-driver. [*As CHRISTMAS SPIRIT speaks curtains roll back, showing room or hall with maids and men gathered about PERKINS. They have on wraps and are carrying suitcases and bags.*]

MR. HARDCASH [*leans forward*]. What's this, what's this?

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. I show you your own household as it will be tomorrow.

COOK *and others in scene*. "Come on, Perkins, come with us, let the old crab look out for himself."

PERKINS. "No, no. I've been here a long time. I can't leave Mr. Hardcash. I don't blame you young people, but I'm sorry—"

ALL [*trooping out*]. "Well, good-bye, Perkins. Sorry you won't come."

PERKINS. Good-bye, good-bye! [*As he is left alone.*]
Too bad, too bad! They are a fine lot, but they hate the master.

MR. HARDCASH. Here, here, Perkins! Don't let those people go! [*PERKINS does not hear and curtains close.*]

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. [*MR. HARDCASH starts and turns as CHRISTMAS SPIRIT speaks.*] You see how you have driven all your servants from you by intolerance and unkindness.

MR. HARDCASH. But I can't have my servants leave me like this. I *must* get Perkins. [*Starts up.*]

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. You will remain where you are. You have much to see and learn.

[*This scene could be handled in several ways. As written it calls for a central curtained opening at the back of the stage, where the successive scenes could be framed. If this arrangement is not attainable, MR. HARDCASH might be made to appear to sleep and the different groups, at the wave of the hand of the CHRISTMAS SPIRIT, could enter, stand and retreat, after enacting their several parts. If however, the scene is carried out as written, the scene with the servants would require no furniture at all; that of the poor homes could be rough and scant; for the Douglas home the same pieces could be used draped, or the chairs and decorations changed in a moment. The dialogue is short, but affords ample time to make the slight necessary changes.*]

[*Curtains draw back and show sitting room in Douglas home—MRS. DOUGLAS and MARY seated, sewing. MARY has been crying.*]

MRS. DOUGLAS [*tenderly*]. There, dearie, don't cry any more. "Fret not thyself because of evil doers." You should not have spoken so to your employer, but Mr. Hardcash was always a hard man—

MARY. Why, mother, did you ever know him?

MRS. DOUGLAS. Yes, dear, I didn't tell you. You've gotten along fairly well with him, though he didn't pay you as he should.

MARY. But how did you know him?

[MR. HARDCASH *shows surprise and agitation.*]

MRS. DOUGLAS. When I was a girl, dear, he lived in Patchogue near us and he wanted me to marry him. I liked him, too, but he was hard and sharp then and I couldn't marry him. After he went away, I met and loved your father. If he'd been a different man—

MARY. Why, mother, you'd have been rich!

MRS. DOUGLAS. I've had something better, dear. I've had love and faith and courage. Riches are not everything.

MARY [*sadly*]. They are a good deal, mother. Now Frank and I can't get married.

MRS. DOUGLAS. Yes, you can, dear. I have faith to believe it will come out right. I think I hear Frank.

[MARY *gets up and hurries out of room.* MRS. DOUGLAS *sighs and turns full face to MR. HARDCASH.*]

MR. HARDCASH [*starts up with outstretched hands*]. Effie, Effie! [MRS. DOUGLAS *makes no sign and MR. HARDCASH sinks back.* MARY and FRANK BENT *enter scene.* MRS. DOUGLAS *looks up, FRANK lays hand on her shoulder.*]

FRANK. Well, mother, we've made up our minds. I'm resigning from Hardcash & Co. I'm going with Barker.

MRS. DOUGLAS [*gently*]. But, son, you are so thoroughly acquainted with the business, won't you be missed?

FRANK. I hope so. I like the work and am thoroughly conversant with it, but Mr. Hardcash doesn't make it

worth one's while and I am going with Barker. [*Curtains close.*]

MR. HARDCASH [*starting up*]. Stop them! Stop them!
I want to speak to Bent and Effie.

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT [*coldly*]. They do not need you.
You could have had their loyalty and affection—

MR. HARDCASH [*buries face in hands*]. But Effie—
Effie's daughter—I loved Effie. [*Remains quiet for a long time. CHRISTMAS SPIRIT watches him intently and then speaks.*] [*Time for change of scene.*]

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. She loved a better man.

MR. HARDCASH. I know, I know. [*Curtain unrolls.*]

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. Look at these.

[*A poor room is shown in which two old people sit side by side, hand in hand. They are CAMERON, the gardener, and his WIFE.*]

WIFE. I wouldn't mind the poorhouse, dearie, if we could be together.

CAMERON. That's the worst of it. If only we could be together. We've had many years together—more than most—we should be thankful, I suppose— [*WIFE begins to cry. Curtains close.*]

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. That man served you for years for a pittance and you turn him off as soon as he became crippled with rheumatism.

MR. HARDCASH. I didn't know, I didn't know.

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. You *should* have known. Your wealth gave you power to help all these. All we have in this world is given by God to us for those about us, whether it be genius or talent or efficiency or only money.

MR. HARDCASH. *Only* money—I should have thought—

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. *You* would have thought that the *most* important. That has been your mistake. Money is the least of all good things. Used for the advancement of justice and peace and happiness of those less fortunate, it is a great thing; but pursued, hoarded and begrudged, it becomes a curse. Your father built a business on broad principles of righteousness and generosity. You have changed it to a grasping, grinding monopoly. Here is where you might have helped. [*Curtain unrolls and shows a small, poor room with a couch, a tiny oil stove; a woman in shabby clothes is stirring something in a saucepan. She shivers and draws her shawl around her. There are one cup and saucer and a small teapot on the table.*]

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. The widow of brave Raymond Black, your porter. She scrubs your office. [*Curtain rolls over.*]

MR. HARDCASH. I could have helped them all. Is it too late? Why have you come? To taunt me? [CHRISTMAS SPIRIT *turns away.*] Perhaps to show me my sin and give me another chance.

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. Look again. [*Curtain unrolls and shows a poor kitchen, a small table is being set by* MRS. O'BRIEN. *Enter in a rush* TEDDY, *the newsboy.*]

TEDDY. See, mother, I've a lot of money for you to-night [*Empties pockets of change.*] Mr. Foster gave me that quarter and Miss Douglas gave me that quarter and she was crying, an' Mr. Bent he gave me fifty cents an' Mrs. Black she gave me ten cents.

MRS. O'BRIEN. An' what was that purty Miss Douglas cryin' for?

TEDDY. Sure, I don't know. They was all mad. Guess the old man got them all riled up. He's a mean old thing, he wouldn't give a fellow a quarter. Told me to "get out."

MRS. O'BRIEN. There, there, now Teddy, don't get mad. Come to your supper, like a fine lad. [*Curtain.*]

MR. HARDCASH. Yes, I see. I know I could have helped that boy. He's been coming to my office for a year and I haven't even known his name or anything about him. Good Spirit, give me another chance.

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. That boy, as you say, has been in and out of your office for a year. His father is in the hospital now from overwork and exposure. He will come out weak and delicate to take up an unequal struggle with life. The hardship and exposure he has had to stand will soon break him down again and another family will be left to suffer.

MR. HARDCASH [*eagerly*]. But can I not do something? Is there yet time?

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. There is yet time. Tomorrow is Christmas Eve. You can yet reach some of these. But what have we here?

[*Great noise of romping, laughing and talking behind curtain. Curtain rolls back and shows a cosy sitting or living room, FRED HOLMES, his wife, two little children, MISS ALLEN, his wife's sister. HOLMES is playing horse with a child on his back. A maid enters with a letter. HOLMES takes the letter.*]

MRS. HOLMES. Who's it from, Ted? [*She comes to look over his shoulder. Then, disgustedly.*] Oh, your

Uncle Walter! How disagreeable is he this time? FRED. Oh, just as usual, "declines," of course. "Don't ask me again"—"Nothing to gain." My, but he's the miserable, unhappy man. I'm sorry for him. Well, I'll ask him and ask him. Sometime he may come.

MRS. HOLMES. Well, I'd be glad for your sake, Fred, since you want him, but I'm sure he can't be very pleasant and as for anything to gain, much good his money ever did you, his only living relative.

FRED. It's good I don't count on it, isn't it, dear? [*Laughing.*] He has the worst of it—only money—and we have home and love and faith and courage—

MISS ALLEN. But, Fred, don't you think he'll *leave* you some of his money?

FRED. Sure *not*. He'd sooner leave it to a home for lost dogs. But little I care. I do not envy him—I pity him, alone and unloved. Well, well, come on, kiddies—bed time. [*Runs off with children.*] [*Curtain.*]

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. These are your own—the family of your only sister, who loved you, and because she married the man she loved against your will, you cast her off. She died in poverty and her son is what he is through no help of yours.

MR. HARDCASH. I've been a fool—and blind. I am alone, deserted by servants, by my employees, hated by those I might have helped. Kind Spirit, tell me—you would not be here if not to teach me better—tell me how to remedy these conditions!

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. Do you indeed wish to change the conditions of these whose lives you influence?

MR. HARDCASH. I do, I do!

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. Midnight is passed and the new day will be Christmas Eve. If you can reach all these before the day passes, you may avert sorrow.

MR. HARDCASH. I will, I will. Those poor old people, Black's wife, the O'Briens and Effie—Effie—

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT *slips out unseen.*

MR. HARDCASH. How shall I go to work—[*finds himself alone*]. Gone—ah, now I must get to work. [*Snatches at telephone, rattles it while waiting.*] Hello, give me Eastford 7015-21—yes, yes [*pause*]. That you, Barker? Hardcash speaking. Look here, Barker, I want you over here—yes—tonight. I don't care what you said to me—get a taxi—yes, important, can't wait for morning. Yes, yes, all night, probably. Hurry—'bye. [*hangs up*]. The smartest fellow in the city and I'm holding right on to him. I'll make it worth his while to stay. I'd better list what I want done. Let me see. [*Sits at table and gets out paper and pen.*] Foster's superannuation—it'll have to be full salary, too—it's been a mean salary. Fred into full partnership—Barker manager—bonuses all around—usual raise—half holiday tomorrow—check for Mary, plucky little kid, how she did pitch into me! [*Laughs and rubs his hands*]. Permanent provision for Cameron and Mrs. Black, and that fine little newsboy, and, by golly, there's Perkins! [*Touches bell. PERKINS comes in.*] Oh, by the way, Perkins. I've a plan for the servants and I want you to see about it. [*PERKINS amazed and a little frightened at MR. HARDCASH'S genial manner.*] Don't get scared, old fellow—I suppose it does surprise you to see me

grinning, but I feel like grinning, Perkins, and I'm going to keep on grinning. [*Gets up and strides up and down. Slaps PERKINS on the back every few minutes. PERKINS, terrified, dodges and jumps.*] I want you to order the biggest Christmas tree in town and trim it up and get toys and presents for everybody. Get Mrs. Perkins to help you and tell them all to bring their families and the girls to bring their beaus and the men to bring their girls and give them a bang-up party. Use the ball room. [*Every time he comes near PERKINS dodges and jumps.*] It'll take lots of money and I'll write you a check. [*Writes check.*] There, take that, and you can have more if you want it. By Jove, it'll be great. Give them the best supper. Tell cook it's up to her.

PERKINS. But, sir, this is too much. It is far too much—

MR. HARDCASH. Nothing of the sort. Make a list of all the help in the morning and I'll give you checks for them all. [*Bell rings.*] There's Barker. Show him in and then clear out and go to bed. So they would all leave, would they?

PERKINS [*staring, hand to head, dazed*]. Now, how on earth did he know that? [*Exit.*]

MR. HARDCASH [*sits at desk. Enter BARKER, hurried, anxious*]. Come in, Barker, come in!

BARKER. What is it, sir? Are you ill?

MR. HARDCASH. No, no, Barker, never was better. I don't know just what's happened. Some sort of a revelation or a miracle or something. I'm to have another chance.

BARKER [*amazed*]. Another chance?

MR. HARDCASH. Yes, yes, to make good, you know,

to all those poor people I could have helped—
BARKER [*awe stricken*]. He-e-lped?

MR. HARDCASH. Yes. Sit down, Barker, we've a lot to do. [BARKER *sits with paper and pen. Looks at MR. HARDCASH with doubt and amazement.*] I want my nephew, Fred Holmes, made full partner in all my concerns. Can you have an arrangement of that sort made for tomorrow or Christmas Day?

BARKER. We could make out a document that would be legal until full arrangements were made.

MR. HARDCASH. Do it. I want all my employees given a half-holiday tomorrow and—what was the usual Christmas bonus my father used to give?

BARKER. Two per cent of salary, I think. [BARKER *speaks in a half dazed way, more and more surprised.*]

MR. HARDCASH. Make it five per cent. I've a lot of back payments to make up.

BARKER. But it will take a most enormous amount of money.

MR. HARDCASH [*sharply*]. But I've got an enormous amount of money! Superannuate Foster—he's been hoping for it—full salary—

BARKER. Oh!

MR. HARDCASH. Put young Bent in his place and let salary commence at the amount of Foster's. You'll stay, Barker, won't you? [*Anxiously.*] I'll double your salary. You'll be general manager of all my concerns with Fred. He'll need you. I'm going to be busy—

BARKER. I should think so! *Sure* I'll stay!

MR. HARDCASH. I don't know what to do for that little Douglas girl. My! She did pitch into me! [*laughs and rubs his hands*]. Well, we'll just give her a good

check for a Christmas gift and wedding present. I'll need a new secretary—no, I won't! Ha, Ha. Fred will! That little sister-in-law of his looked smart—I wonder—

BARKER. Don't set your heart on her, sir, I think I'll need her myself.

MR. HARDCASH. What, what? You and Fred's sister-in-law? Why—[*stands up and shakes hand, slaps BARKER on shoulder*] it will be quite a family affair. Fine, fine, Barker! Oh, and we'll arrange the salary raises, Barker, and do a little better with them. [*Walks up and down thoughtfully.*] Now, what to do about poor old Cameron, Barker, something must be done at once. They're going to the poor house tomorrow. We can't allow that. I could bring them here—

BARKER. If you'll allow me, sir, I've a plan. Foster and I have felt pretty badly for them—

MR. HARDCASH. Yes, yes, I dare say. [*Aside.*] What a fool I've been!—What's your plan?

BARKER. There's a little house with a garden and a small greenhouse down on East street. It would be a fine place and is for sale just as it stands. Its former owner, a gardener in a small way, died recently and his wife wants to get away to a married daughter.

MR. HARDCASH. Buy it, buy it, Barker! But they're so helpless, they'll need help.

BARKER. We only hoped to rent it, sir, but this will be much better. We didn't dare attempt it just yet until I got placed. We thought if Janet Black could live with them it would be a home for her. Of course, it was only a dream.

MR. HARDCASH. Make it real! Buy the place! Get Mrs. Black, you 'll need help—

BARKER. Miss Douglas and her mother might help me.

MR. HARDCASH. Yes, get them to help. Can you do it tomorrow? I 'll settle an income on them and when they 're through with it, they can leave it to Mrs. Black.

BARKER. I 'm sure we can arrange everything.

MR. HARDCASH. Now, what can we do for that news-boy?

BARKER [*admiringly*]. Why, Mr. Hardcash, you think of everybody.

MR. HARDCASH. Well, it 's a poor place where they live—

BARKER [*surprised*]. Have you seen it?

MR. HARDCASH. Yes— [*confused*] —er—no—well, in a sort of a way.

BARKER [*aside*]. He seems to know all about them just the same.

MR. HARDCASH. Well, what about them?

BARKER. I think, sir, if Mrs. and Miss Douglas would go and see the mother—

MR. HARDCASH [*eagerly*]. Yes, yes, that 's it, send Effie.

BARKER. Her name 's Mary.

MR. HARDCASH. Yes, I know, I forgot. I was thinking of someone else. I will stand for the money. I never had any fun out of my money. I never knew what fun it would be to spend it.

BARKER. There are lots of ways to spend it, sir, if one has the heart to do it.

MR. HARDCASH. Well, I never had, but I have now.

I 'll be down early tomorrow, Barker, and I 'll astonish those solicitors who come for the Salvation Army

and the Day Nursery and the widows and orphans. They always come and I always turn them down. I'll astonish them, ha, ha! [*Laughs and rubs hands.*]

BARKER. Well, Mr. Hardcash, you've given me a big job, but it's a job I love, and with your permission I'll get right at it. [*Rises and holds out hand.*] Good night, sir, and—and—and God bless you. You'll make a lot of people happy. Thank you for my part.

MR. HARDCASH [*shaking hands, patting Barker on shoulder*]. All right, all right, Barker. Thank you for joining in so heartily and you must have thought me crazy. Try to get some sleep. You've a great day ahead of you. Good night and Merry Christmas. [*BARKER exit.*] Fine chap, Barker, glad he'll stay and, by Jove, I forgot Fred's little sister-in-law. Well, well, I must talk everything over with Effie. [*Walks up and down.* CHRISTMAS SPIRIT *enters unseen.* MR. HARDCASH *turns in his walk and sees CHRISTMAS SPIRIT.*] Why, there you are again! Come in! [*CHRISTMAS SPIRIT shakes head smilingly.*] No? Well, I'm glad you came. I'd like to keep you always—

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. You may do so if you carry a kind heart all through the year. There's one who could help—

MR. HARDCASH [*eagerly*]. You mean Effie?

[*CHRISTMAS SPIRIT nods and steps backward out of room.*]

MR. HARDCASH. Yes, she will help, I know. I've lost much time, but I can still do much, thanks to the Christmas Spirit.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE: *Library or any room in MR. HARDCASH'S house—a gathering place for all the characters.*

MR. HARDCASH *standing to receive guests*—PERKINS *opens door and announces, "MRS. DOUGLAS," who enters smiling and with both hands out to MR. HARDCASH, who advances to meet her and takes her hands.*

MRS. DOUGLAS. Well, Walter—

MR. HARDCASH. Well, Effie—

MRS. DOUGLAS. How many years is it?

MR. HARDCASH. A good many. Don't let us count them.

MRS. DOUGLAS. I'll have to apologize, Walter. I've thought you a terrible man. I'd no idea you could be so generous. I expect you've been doing things for people all your life, but we never happened across it before.

MR. HARDCASH. I'm a bit tempted to let you think so, Effie, but the truth is I have been just as mean and hard and selfish as I could be always until a couple of days ago.

MRS. DOUGLAS. And what happened then? [*They sit down near center.*]

MR. HARDCASH. I had a shock and a sort of vision.

MRS. DOUGLAS. A vision!

MR. HARDCASH. Seems queer, doesn't it: I can't just explain it. The Christmas Spirit got hold of me and showed me all my meanness and how I could have

been surrounded with love and loyalty instead of with hatred and fear—and I saw you—

MRS. DOUGLAS. You saw me! But how? I've kept out of your way—I never let Mary know I'd ever seen you.

MR. HARDCASH. The Christmas Spirit showed me many things. I suppose Mary and Barker had given me a sort of spiritual shock, anyway. You heard?

MRS. DOUGLAS. Yes, Mary told me. I scolded her—

MR. HARDCASH. She was right and so was Barker, but I truly think I am a changed man, Effie, and you and Mary have done wonderful things, Barker tells me, to carry out my Christmas plans.

MRS. DOUGLAS [*enthusiastically*]. And what a joy it's been, Walter! The gratitude of those old people and Janet Black and Mrs. O'Brien—you know there's a *Mr.* O'Brien, Walter.

MR. HARDCASH. Is there?

MRS. DOUGLAS. Yes, in the hospital, poor chap, getting over a long bout with pneumonia. The doctors prescribe rest and country life, but of course these are impossibilities.

MR. HARDCASH. Nothing is impossible, Effie. I'll send him and his family to Kingslea.

MRS. DOUGLAS. Where your mills are?

MR. HARDCASH. Yes, I've a fine place there. They can have a cottage and he can potter around and help the gardener and we'll pay him a fair wage—

MRS. DOUGLAS. *We?*

MR. HARDCASH. Forgive me, Effie—my dreams seem more real than facts just now. I had hoped—I wish—I—don't think me a fool, but there is much to be

done and I wondered if you and I couldn't just get quietly married and leave Fred and Barker to run things here and we go off to live at Kingslea. The mills and cottages and everything about the place are in bad shape from neglect—

MRS. DOUGLAS. But, Walter—

MR. HARDCASH. Yes, I know, dear, I'm making a bad mess of it. I always do—

MRS. DOUGLAS [*indignantly*]. You're not!

MR. HARDCASH. But do you think you *could*? I never loved any other girl and you *did* like me. You married a better man, but I need you now. Think of all the money—

MRS. DOUGLAS. I won't!!

MR. HARDCASH [*taking her hands and laughing*]. I don't mean the *amount* of it. I mean the fact that it has to get loosened up and got to working. For the sake of my millers and miners and all—

MRS. DOUGLAS. For your sake *entirely*, Walter—Yes.

PERKINS [*announces*]. Mr. Foster!

MR. HARDCASH [*springing up and advancing to meet FOSTER*]. Well, hello, Foster. Glad to see you. You know Mrs. Douglas? Oh, I expect you all know each other far better than I know you.

FOSTER. Mr. Hardcash, you took me all by surprise, sir. I'm more than grateful. I've long wanted a home in some out-of-the-city, quiet place, and your generosity—

MR. HARDCASH. Nonsense, old friend! Don't let anyone ever talk of *my* generosity. And as for a country home, why not follow me and go to Kingslea?

FOSTER. Kingslea! Are you thinking of going there, sir?

MR. HARDCASH. I am, indeed. There's work enough there, changing existing conditions.

FOSTER. It's a beautiful place, sir, if conditions were bettered.

MR. HARDCASH. They will be, they will be and you shall advise.

FOSTER. Indeed, I shall be very glad.

PERKINS [*announces*]. Miss Douglas, Mr. Bent.

[MR. HARDCASH, FOSTER and MRS. DOUGLAS all advance to meet them, shaking hands. FRANK BENT starts to say something about "*gratitude*"—]

MR. HARDCASH [*checks him*]. There, there, my boy, it's all right. Glad you're pleased. Someone else pleased too, eh? [*Looking at MARY.*]

MARY [*shyly*]. Yes, dear Mr. Hardcash, and I want to show you my Christmas gift from Frank. You're the first one I've shown it to, after mother. [*Shows ring. All admire it.*]

MR. HARDCASH. And I'll have to get another private secretary?

MARY. Yes, please, sir.

MR. HARDCASH. Well, I've made my arrangements. I'm going to have a *wife*, instead.

ALL. *A wife!!*

MR. HARDCASH. Yes, the only girl I ever loved. Come Effie! [*draws MRS. DOUGLAS forward.*]

MARY and FRANK. Why, mother!

FOSTER. Mrs. Douglas!

MRS. DOUGLAS. Yes, dears, and Mr. Foster, Mr. Hard-

cash has asked me to marry him and I've gladly and proudly said yes.

PERKINS [*announces*]. Mr. and Mrs. Holmes, Miss Allen, Miss Muriel, Master Walter, Mr. Barker.

[*Enter all. Children carry doll and engine, which they show to party. All shake hands, exclaiming, "Merry Christmas," "How are you?" etc., etc. MARY and MRS. DOUGLAS sit and talk excitedly in whispers. BENT and FOSTER draw back a little to talk business. The family group, with MR. HARD-CASH and FRED, occupy the center.*]

FRED. Well, Uncle Walter, you'll have to put me wise to a lot of the inside workings—

MR. HARDCASH. Not at all. Not going near you. Up to Barker. Eh, Barker?

BARKER [*laughs*]. Whatever you say, sir.

MR. HARDCASH. Yes, I intend to work hard after this, drawing my income and spending it. Mrs. Hardcash and I—

ALL. Mrs. Hardcash!!

MR. HARDCASH. Yes. Effie, come here. Fred, let me introduce your new aunt.

MRS. DOUGLAS. Now, Walter, you're rather premature. aren't you?

FRED. Well! But this is great news. I shall take a nephew's privilege, Aunt Effie! [*kisses her*].

MRS. DOUGLAS. That's very dear of you, Fred.

FRED [*introducing*]. My wife, Mrs. Douglas, dear—her sister, Miss Allen—my two kiddies, Muriel and Walter. Shake hands, babies. Mr. Barker, no relation as yet!

BARKER [*shaking hands*]. But soon hopes to be.

MR. HARDCASH. Well, well, good for you, Barker. Well, girls, you 'll have to run the firm of Hardcash & Co. These two boys will bear watching. It's all in the family now.

[BENT and BARKER shake hands, girls compare rings.]

PERKINS [*announces*]. Mr. and Mrs. Cameron, Mrs. Black.

[*Enter old couple, bent and lame, wife pale and delicate. MRS. BLACK, young, trim and neat.*]

MR. HARDCASH [*shakes hands. All shake hands. Get chairs, footstools. MRS. BLACK removes old lady's shawl, etc.*] Merry Christmas, Cameron and Mrs. Cameron; Merry Christmas, Mrs. Black.

CAMERON. Oh, sir, we want to tell you—oh, sir—

MRS. CAMERON [*begins to cry*]. We never had a hope, sir, as we could grow old together.

MR. HARDCASH [*embarrassed*]. There, there, it's all right. You'll be looked after.

MR. CAMERON. You tell 'em, Janet. I can't.

MRS. BLACK. They are so grateful, sir. The little house is so comfortable and cosy, and Mrs. Douglas, ma'am, the wonder of you, getting everything fixed up so quick—

MR. HARDCASH [*slipping hand through MRS. DOUGLAS'S arm*]. She's a wonder!

MRS. DOUGLAS. It was such a joy—the dear old things are so happy!

MRS. BLACK. And they want me to say, sir, that they won't need money, sir—with the little greenhouse he can potter around and make a bit of money and

there 's a good garden and there 's a little spare room, we could take a lodger and I could still go to work and take care of them, too—

MR. HARDCASH. Not at all, Janet. If Ray had died in France you 'd have had a pension and you 're going to have it now. I believe Cameron will enjoy the greenhouse and garden, and make a little money, but you must not go to work. They need you and the house is yours when they are through with it.

MRS. BLACK. Oh, sir! [*face in hands.*]

PERKINS [*announces*]. Mrs. O'Brien, Master Teddy.

[*Enter MRS. O'BRIEN and TEDDY. All greet MRS. O'BRIEN and TEDDY. Children carry TEDDY off to look at doll and engine.*]

MRS. O'BRIEN. Sure, it 's the great Christmas we 've had sir! With all the foine things ye sent us, an' Mrs. Douglas, too, and we took the check up to show Mike in the hospital—my! but he 's the proud man!!

MRS. DOUGLAS. And how is he, Mrs. O'Brien?

MRS. O'BRIEN. Sure, he 's comin' great, ma'am. We may get him home come February, but sure, it 's a poor place—

MR. HARDCASH. But ye 've got a better one for him.

MRS. O'BRIEN [*looks from one smiling face to another as all look at her*]. Oh, sir—oh, ma'am— [*to MRS. DOUGLAS*] Phwat is it?

MRS. DOUGLAS [*looks at MR. HARDCASH, who nods*]. Mrs. O'Brien, Mr. Hardcash is going to live at his beautiful place at Kingslea and there 's a pretty cottage there for a gardener and you and Mike and Teddy are to have it and Mike can do some easy work when

he 's quite strong again, and there 's a good school for Teddy—

TEDDY [*who has been listening intently*]. An' cows an' pigs an' a garden?

MRS. DOUGLAS. All of those, Teddy, and chickens and ducks and horses—

TEDDY Gee-e-!!

MRS. O'BRIEN [*crying*]. Sure, sir, and ma'am, forgive me, but it 's for joy I 'm cryin'. Me poor Mike, he 'll get well and sthrong. Oh, sir! and they to say you was a hard man! [*all look at MR. HARDCASH*].

MR. HARDCASH. They said truth, Mrs. O'Brien. I was a hard man. [*Enter PERKINS.*] Well, Perkins, a letter? Thank you. I hope, Mrs. O'Brien, that I 'm a *changed* man. I make no boasts, I 'm only a beginner, but I hope I 'm no longer a hard man. [*Opens letter.*] Why, what's this, Perkins?

PERKINS [*bowing and smiling*]. They wanted I should write it, sir, and they all signed their names.

MRS. DOUGLAS. What is it?

MR. HARDCASH [*much moved*]. A letter from all the staff and signed.

MRS. DOUGLAS [*reading*]. "Thanks for a happy Christmas, happiest in years—best wishes"—and all their names. How *dear*! [*Party groups into tableau, MR. HARDCASH and MRS. DOUGLAS reading letter together—BARKER and MISS ALLEN—BENT and MARY—the three children on floor with toys—FOSTER and PERKINS—MRS. O'BRIEN and MRS. BLACK and the old people.*]

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT [*enters unseen; passes among group, touching each one with wand, stands center front, addresses audience*]. Into the hard heart of one man

the Spirit of Christmas found entrance and what a fund of happiness that one man was able to supply to many! Let the Christmas Spirit into *your* heart, let it teach you the joy of sharing your happiness, your wealth, your advantages, and let it not leave you with the day it celebrates, but keep it with you the whole year through. For, as the Star of Bethlehem beckoned the shepherds from the plains, so even to-day the Christmas Spirit points the way to the hearts of men; spreading afar the tidings of Good-fellowship, Happiness and Loyal Friendship.

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